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UNCLAS BANGKOK 000466

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SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: FAIR TH
SUBJECT: COUNTRY CLEARANCE TO BANGKOK FOR FAA
PERSONNEL, JAMES C. HELBERG

REF: SINGAPORE 000080

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (U) Post welcomes and grants country clearance to James C. Helberg, Aviation Safety Inspector for the Federal Aviation Administration International Field Office for Asia Pacific, for February 7 to February 10, 2006.

¶2. (U) Embassy point of contact is Aaron Forsberg, Transportation Officer, telephone number 66-2-205-4698, ForsbergAP@state.gov. Embassy understands no assistance is required.

¶3. (U) Due to limited resources and easy availability of airport transportation, post policy does not allow for airport meet and assist. Thai Airways Limousine Service and American Express Airport Taxi are recommended for persons unfamiliar with Bangkok. These services are located inside the arrival hall, which you enter after clearing customs. The cost of a one-way trip varies from 700 to 1500 Baht, depending on the type of vehicle, figure in another 70 Baht for expressway tolls. Regular taxis are also available and cost approximately 225 Baht, not including tolls, and a taxi airport surcharge of 50 Baht. Currently, the Thai Baht is approximately 40/dollar.

¶4. (U) After-hours emergency number for the embassy is 66-2-205-4108.

¶5. (U) Although visas are not required of holders of U.S. passports (whether diplomatic, official or tourist) who plan to stay fewer than 30 days, post nonetheless recommends that TDY travelers, particularly those staying for a couple of weeks or longer, obtain an official visa before coming to Thailand. If for whatever reason the traveler has to extend the stay, it is extremely difficult to extend a 30-day tourist visa obtained at the airport; and fines for overstays are costly.

¶6. (U) Thailand has an airport departure tax of 500 Baht that must be paid in local currency upon departure.

¶7. (SBU) SECURITY INFORMATION

¶A. (U) MANDATORY PERSONAL SECURITY TRAINING:

- (U) All U.S. citizen personnel serving under Chief of Mission authority in a temporary duty status of 30 days or more must complete appropriate overseas personal security training prior to travel (04 State 66580). Employees who have completed the Security Overseas Seminar course at State's Foreign Service Institute (FSI) after June 1, 2000 meet this requirement. All other TDYers must either 1) complete the approved four-day seminar at FSI entitled "Serving Abroad for Families & Employees (SAFE)" or 2) have their agency certify to the State Department Bureau of Diplomatic Security that the employee has undergone equivalent security training. The contact for this certification is Assistant Director of Training, DS/T, at telephone (703) 205-12617. Country clearance will not be granted for any traveler with planned TDY in excess of 30 days if this information is not stated/certified. POC for additional information is DS_RSOBangkok@state.gov.

1B. (U) CRIME:

- (U) Crime is generally non-confrontational in nature. Criminal acts are usually crimes of opportunity such as purse-snatchings, thefts of unattended property, and pick pocketing. Visitors should be especially alert in crowded buses, streets, and markets or while on "tuk-tuks." Visitors should lock valuables in hotel safe deposit boxes not in their hotel rooms.

-(U) Be aware of common scams and frauds (including credit cards, in particular). Visitors should only use credit cards at well-established and reputable businesses. Visitors should be careful when purchasing branded or copyrighted goods. There are many pirated counterfeit products in the marketplace; their purchase is against post regulations and it is illegal to import these products into the U.S. Be wary of common scams for jewelry, suits, silks, gems, or antiquities. There are no Thai government-owned or sponsored gem stores. If victimized, seek assistance from Tourist Police by dialing 1155.

- (U) Visitors are cautioned from visiting bars involved in the sex trade. Many of these operate illegally and clients can be subject to RTG law; they often charge exorbitant drink prices and cover charges. There are also many incidents of crime against patrons in these establishments. Drugging and robbing of unwary individuals is not uncommon. There are frequent reports of victims being drugged and robbed or beaten when visiting these bars. The drugs used can cause serious temporary memory impairment, unconsciousness, and if overdosed, death.

1C. (U) TRAFFIC:

- (U) The traffic situation in Bangkok can be difficult and dangerous for both pedestrians and vehicle occupants. All visitors should be alert to traffic patterns and unexpected motorcycle drivers. Traffic drives on the left-hand side, opposite from the U.S., although there may be a bus lane that flows in the opposite direction. Pedestrians should use the overhead walkways for crossing busy streets.

1D. (U) TERRORISM:

- (SBU) The threat from transnational terrorist groups to the U.S. Mission in Bangkok is currently ranked high. Despite stepped up RTG efforts to monitor its borders, they remain relatively porous and allow easy illegal access. Transnational terrorist groups, including Al-Qa'ida and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), have utilized Thailand as a transit point.

- (SBU) The threat from indigenous terrorist groups is currently rated as low. There is no evidence to indicate that indigenous terrorist groups are planning acts against U.S. personnel or facilities. The far south of Thailand has experienced incidents of criminally and politically motivated violence, including incidents attributed to armed local Muslim separatist groups. Although Americans have not been specifically targeted in the past, the indiscriminate nature of past attacks by these groups - including bombings of public places - indicates a potential threat to American citizens.

- (U) The State Department is concerned that there is an increased risk of terrorism in Southeast Asia, including Thailand. Travelers to Thailand should therefore exercise caution, especially in locations where Westerners congregate, such as clubs, discos, bars, restaurants, hotels, tourist areas, and other places frequented by foreigners.

DE. (U) OTHER SECURITY TIPS:

- (U) Visitors should avoid making any pejorative comments about any members of the Thai Royal Family or engaging in disrespectful conduct within temples or toward religious objects. Such behavior can result in arrest and/or expulsion from Thailand.

- (U) Precautions should also be taken not to discuss sensitive or classified matters outside secure environments or over unsecured and/or cellular telephones, and to securely safeguard classified or sensitive materials at the Chancery

and not at hotels or residences.

- (U) Visitors should also be aware of the State Department's Consular Information Sheet for Thailand and the most recent Worldwide Caution Public Announcements, which are available via the Internet at <http://travel.state.gov>. DOD personnel must review the PACOM Force Protection Levels for Thailand found at <http://131.84.1.218/staff/at/athome.shtml>.

- (U) In essence, visitors to Bangkok must exercise appropriate caution and be alert to their surroundings with regard to their personal security. Suspicious incidents/activities should be reported to RSO Bangkok (tel. 02-205-4000, 24 hrs/day). On behalf of US Embassy Bangkok, we hope you have a safe and pleasant visit.

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